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ABSTRACT

Each teacher has a style of teaching that provides the most effective way to help students grasp the desired learning concepts. One point teachers agree on is that teaching vocabulary to children needs to be an active process that engages students in entertaining activities and helps them build a bridge between already known vocabulary and the new vocabulary. This topical bibliography and commentary offers ideas and strategies delineated in recent research to help classroom teachers develop vocabulary skills in young students: Ediger's (1999) and Cudd and Roberts' (1994) paradigms on teaching vocabulary; the VOCABULARY system; visual representation techniques, such as the Concept Wheel, the Semantic Word Map, Webbing, the Concept of Definition, and the Semantic Feature Analysis; games, such as the Vocabulary Connection, using vocabulary packs, cued spelling, storytelling, cooperative learning techniques, story development, Charades, and the Magic Square; and the use of electronic books. Lists 2 Internet resources and 21 references. (NKA)

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Successful Techniques of Vocabulary

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Introduction

Each teacher has a style of teaching that provides the most effective way to help students grasp the desired concepts. One point teachers agree on is that teaching vocabulary to children needs to be an active process that engages students in entertaining activities and helps students build a bridge between already known vocabulary and the new vocabulary. The following techniques challenge and inspire young readers in building their vocabulary repertoire: Ediger's (1999) and Cudd & Roberts' (1994) paradigms on teaching vocabulary; the VOCABULARY system; visual representation techniques such as the Concept Wheel, the Semantic Word Map, Webbing, the Concept of Definition, and the Semantic Feature Analysis; games such as the Vocabulary Connection, using vocabulary packs, cued spelling, storytelling, cooperative learning techniques, story development, Charades, and The Magic Square; and the use of electronic books.

Paradigms of Teaching Vocabulary

Ediger (2002) provides a list of learning opportunities which will aid pupils contextually in vocabulary development:

- Reading orally to pupils
- Having pupils engage in discussions
- Participating in activities at the listening center
- Reading library books
- Participating at the audio visual center
- Being involved in the writing center
- Making pictured dictionaries
- Engaging in story telling
- Using dictionaries and the glossary
- Taking turns reading aloud in small groups
- Being involved in individualized spelling
- Participating in the speaking center
- Discussion objects at the interest center

In using sentences to help students learn vocabulary, Cudd & Roberts (1994) suggest the following system:

1. Select vocabulary from the basal reader or content area material to embed in sentence stems.
2. Select a particular syntactic structure to introduce.
3. Embed the targeted vocabulary into sentence stems that will produce complex sentences.
4. Personalize the sentence stems by adding children's names and familiar events, people, or places.
5. Write two to five sentence stems on the chalkboard and discuss.
6. Have students respond by finishing the sentence orally.
7. Pair students up to help each other with editing.
8. Have students illustrate one or two sentences, adding details to their drawings (p. 347).

Techniques

Vocabulary

Towell (1998) combines approaches taken by different authors to create the acronym VOCABULARY.

V: Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS); Visual-Auditory-Kinesthetic-Tactile (VAKT)

VSS (Haggard, 1986): When students find a new word, they are asked to tell where they found it, the context in which it was found, the importance of the word, and why they selected it.

VAKT: Students are told to trace the selected word with a finger while pronouncing each syllable until they can write it from memory. Ex: Writing in the air or on a child's back.

O: Onsets and rimes

This technique helps develop phonemic awareness and helps students learn sight words by using word patterns. "The onset is the part of the word before the vowel; the rime includes the vowel and the rest of the letters in the word" (Towell, 1998, p. 356). Towell highly recommends the book *Oopples and Boo-noo-noos* by Yopp & Yopp (1996).

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C: Color shock; clusters (Said Web)

Color shock (Vitale, 1982) "is a technique that was originally designed for right-brained, learning disabled students to help them remember sight words. Right-brained children seem to have a special sensitivity for bright colors" (Towell, 1998, p. 356). The children write their words with each letter in a different color, starting with green. Green represents *go* and indicates the beginning of the word.

Clusters (Said Web) are "sets of words that relate to a single concept. Clustering is the process of relating a target word to a set of synonyms or other associated words" (Towell, 1998, p. 356). This strategy encourages students to examine **clusters** of words and the words' linkages to one another so that vocabulary study would occur as meaningful groups instead of lists of isolated words (Laframboise, 2000).

A: ABC books; anagrams

In using *alphabet books*, students can be motivated to learn words through illustrations. Students can be encouraged to identify synonyms, antonyms, and parts of speech for their self-selected word. They might enjoy creating their own ABC book based on a selected topic.

Anagrams like the ones found in *The Eleventh Hour* by Graeme Base (1989) are a fun way to learn vocabulary. The readers solve complicated mysteries by using anagrams and other clues.

B: Book boxes; boxes for visual configuration; banks for words

Book boxes are filled in with objects representing the key words or concepts in the story. The book and other related reading material can also be placed in the box.

Boxes for visual configuration (Thatcher, 1984) involves "drawing around words to emphasize their length and shape" (Towell, 1998, p. 357). Students learn to recognize shapes before individual letters or words.

Word banks are created by students for storing and remembering the words selected.

U: Unusual and unknown words

Unusual words, or "sniglets" as coined by Rich Hall, are created and defined with common affixes and bases by students. Ex: *baldage*, meaning *hair left in the drain after showering* (Hall, 1985).

Unknown words– The following is a strategy to learn new words:

1. Beep it. Say "beep" for the unknown word and read to the end of the sentence. Think of a word that would make sense in that space. Use context clues.
2. Frame it. Put index fingers around the word to separate it from the rest of the sentence.
3. Begin it. Look at the beginning sound or sounds (letter or blend).
4. Split it. Divide it into syllables and pronounce them.
5. Find it. Look it up in the dictionary or ask someone as a last resort (Towell, 1998, p. 357).

L: List-Group-Label; Language Experience Approach

List-Group-Label (Readence & Searfoss, 1980) is a strategy that can be used with ABC books. Working in groups, students attempt to list as many words as possible that begin with the specific letter on the page of the book. After the lists are created and counted, students categorize the words.

The Language Experience Approach encourages creative writing, word banks, and dictated stories. "Publishing their stories in book formats for the class library can be powerful for building vocabulary as well as self-esteem" (Towell, 1998, p. 357).

A: Active Involvement

Students learn more if they are *actively involved* in the learning process (Carr & Wixson, 1986; Nagy, 1988). Acting words out, creating song lyrics, and using sign language are exercises which can be used.

R: Repetition; rhymes; riddles; roots

Repetition of vocabulary words can be accomplished through language experience, Readers Theatre, tape-recorded books, patterned or predictable books, basals, and rhymes in poetry.

Riddles written and solved by students are fun ways to help learn vocabulary. Reading a riddle from the chalkboard each day or bringing riddles in on their own are ways for students to learn many words.

Roots and affixes of words can be studied as a way to increase vocabulary.

Y: Yarns

Creating tall tales or *yarns* is a fun way for students to learn new words.

Visual Representations

The methods put forth by Rupley, Logan, & Nichols (1998) use diagrams, flowcharts, and tables to help students find relationships between known and new vocabulary.

The concept wheel/circle

The concept wheel "visually displays the connection between previous conceptual knowledge and the new word being encountered" (p. 339). The teacher chooses the word and asks students to list words that come to mind with the targeted word. After the class brainstorms a list, the teacher asks them to look up the definition. Students compare their generated list of words to the definition. From their list, they pick three words that will help them remember the targeted word. The teacher provides a wheel divided in quarter sections where students place the target word and the three words from their list.

Semantic word map

"Semantic word maps allow students to conceptually explore their knowledge of a new word by mapping it with other words or phrases, which categorically share meaning with the new word.... Word maps allow students to learn the connection among several words in order to provide a clearer definition of the concept

represented. The concept becomes clearer when words are grouped together by similar criteria such as ideas, events, characteristics, examples, and so forth" (p. 340-341). The teacher asks the class to brainstorm as many words and concepts as it can with regard to the targeted word. The teacher places these suggestions on the board. The students as a class or in small groups put the generated word list under the designated categories. The targeted word, categories, and generated words are put in squares and lines are drawn to show how they are interconnected as well as connected to the targeted word.

Webbing

Webbing is "a method that graphically illustrates how to associate words meaningfully and allows students to make connections between what they know about words and how words are related" (p. 341). The teacher starts with a web with an empty center. "Students can begin to understand the relationship of words in the web by choosing and considering words that might complete the center word" (p. 341). The teacher asks students to brainstorm ideas which come to mind when they think of the targeted word. The teacher may need to redirect the students when their suggestions become too peripheral. The words are placed in circles and connecting lines create the web.

Concept of definition

> A variation of concept mapping and webbing is a procedure Schwartz & Raphael (1985) refer to as concept of definition, which provides a framework for organizing information in order to define new vocabulary words. Concept of definition instruction enables students to clarify the meaning of unknown terms by using a hierarchical structure to conceptualize the definition of a new term. Concept of definition makes use of categories (What is it?), properties (What is it like?), illustrations (What are some examples?), and comparisons (How are examples same or different?) in order to provide students with a clear understanding of the new term. (Rupley, Logan & Nichols, 1998, p. 343).

The teacher presents the targeted word and asks students to give words which answer the above mentioned questions for the targeted word. The questions are put in squares and the brainstormed words are circled. As the students suggest words, the teacher should ask for a definition and where the word should be placed in the diagram. Lines are drawn connecting the shapes and defining their connections.

Semantic feature analysis

> This approach is beneficial to students when words are closely related by common features. In order for students to analyze common vocabulary, the teacher lists related familiar words, such as types of fish, on a chart. The teacher guides students to discuss features or characteristics associated with the words listed. As students suggest features, they are written across the top of the chart (e.g., location, size, behavior), creating a matrix that the students can complete in terms of presence (+) or absence (-). As the students broaden and define their concepts, the teacher adds words and features to the list and analyzes them. (Rupley, Logan & Nichols, 1998, p. 344)

The students were instructed to do research on which fish would cohabitate best in an aquarium. After the students independently created their charts, the teacher gathered the information and helped the students set up and stock an aquarium.

Games

Iwicki (1992) created and suggests using *Vocabulary Connection* as a warm-up exercise to vocabulary learning. The teacher displays the vocabulary words and their definitions on large wall charts. Students are asked to describe a situation in the new story they are reading that relates to the targeted word. Students can be placed in teams where one selects the words and the other relates it to the reading.

"Hodapp and Hodapp (1996) suggest using *vocabulary packs* and *cued spelling* as intervention strategies, while Cooter (1991) discusses using *storytelling*. Wilkinson (1994) opts for enlivening vocabulary lessons by combining them with two effective teaching strategies–*cooperative learning* and *story development* by students" (Smith, 1997, p.3). Students can also learn by playing *Charades* with vocabulary words (Woodard, 1998).

The *Magic Square* can be used in teaching new vocabulary (Woodard, 1998). The teacher draws a mathematical magic square on a transparency on the overhead projector. The square is made up of 3 x 3 cells. Words and phrases to be learned are placed within the cells. In each cell, there is a vocabulary word. In the lower corner of each cell is a small box. Underneath the magic square is a list of nine numbered words. The challenge is to place the number of a word in the list into the proper box matching its definition. To check the word placement, the students add up the numbers in each box across, diagonally, and up and down. If done correctly, they will all add up to the same number.

The *I Have, Who Has* game was created by Loretta Vail. On the front of the card is "I have ____." On the back of the card is "Who has ____?" "This game reinforces vocabulary words previously studied. A word is listed on the front of a card and one student says, 'I have ____. Who has ____?' The student who has the new word must say, 'I do' and explain what the word means" (Woodard, 1998, p. 11).

Electronic books used in conjunction with additional vocabulary instruction can improve a student's vocabulary significantly (Higgins & Hess, 1999).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored innovative techniques in teaching vocabulary such as Ediger's (1999) and Cudd & Roberts (1994) paradigms on teaching vocabulary; the VOCABULARY system; visual representation techniques such as the Concept Wheel, the Semantic Word Map, Webbing, the Concept of Definition, and the Semantic Feature Analysis; games such as the Vocabulary Connection, using vocabulary packs, cued spelling, storytelling, cooperative learning techniques, story development, Charades, and The Magic Square; and the use of electronic books. With a multitude of teaching strategies available, the teacher is free to choose which ones will fit her style and classroom the best.

Internet Resources

* The Clarifying Routine: Elaborating Vocabulary Instruction
This website provides a variety of tactics and strategies that can be mediated by the teacher to help students understand and remember new terms as well as the significance of important names, events, places, or processes. All of these tactics involve facilitating elaboration in various ways.
http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/teaching_techniques/ellis_clarifying.html

* Practical Teaching Ideas on Vocabulary/Spelling
A collection of links to vocabulary teaching ideas submitted directly by teachers (from the National Council of Teachers of English).
http://serv1.ncte.org/teach/vocab.shtml

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